



# Bill Hinkle

13<sup>th</sup> District State Representative

## 2004 Legislative Report

### Serving citizens in...

- Kittitas
- Yakima and
- Grant counties

### Committees:

- Fisheries, Ecology and Parks  
(ranking Republican)
- Capital Budget
- Juvenile Justice and Family Law

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Dear friends,

The 2004 legislative session was a **positive one for the 13<sup>th</sup> District**. We passed bills that will help our kids, boost local government budgets and assist local irrigators. We also made **positive changes to Washington's business climate**, which will result in more and higher-paying jobs for our state's families.

At the same time, however, we left many important issues on the table, including reining in over-reaching state agencies, passing tort reform and authorizing affordable insurance plans for small employers.

Overall, 2004 was a session of ups and downs, hard-won victories for families, ranchers and small employers, and, in the end, a long list of issues the Legislature will need to take up again next year.

**I thank you** for the honor of serving as your legislator. If you have any questions, want to talk about legislative issues, have an idea for a bill or need help working with a state agency, please contact me anytime. I also invite you to meet with me in Moses Lake, George, or Ephrata (see page 2). **I am here to serve you.**

Sincerely,

Rep. Bill Hinkle

## How did the 13<sup>th</sup> District fare this session?

The Legislature passed several bills this year that will have a direct, positive impact on the people of Central Washington. Here are a few of them:

- A bill I sponsored, signed into law March 26, will **shift up to 80 percent of the excise tax** collected on timber harvested from public land away from state coffers and **into local counties**. This extra revenue will be a big help to rural communities hurt by the economic downturn and the stranglehold of regulations on the timber industry.
- The Legislature also passed a bill I sponsored to create a new **postage**

**stamp honoring the coalmining heritage** of the 13<sup>th</sup> District and other regions of Washington.

- We passed a measure that will make it easier for irrigators in the Odessa aquifer subarea to **use more abundant surface water** from the Columbia Basin Project without relinquishing unused groundwater rights.
- I am also pleased we passed a bill to allow Eastern and Central Washington residents to **challenge state rules and regulations in courts in Yakima or Spokane counties**, rather than only in Thurston County.

## More important wins

The Legislature passed two important education bills this year. One will provide more flexibility in the **Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test**. Schools must now allow for re-takes, require clear achievement standards, and create individual plans for kids with disabilities. We also passed a bill to allow **charter schools** in our state. This is an important step for a couple reasons. First, it gives students from

failing schools and closed schools another chance at success. Second, this is a bold move that doesn't perpetuate the status quo. The bill doesn't *require* charter schools, it just clears the way so *people can try them*. It isn't often the Legislature has the courage to take a giant step that could pay off in a big way, and I am pleased lawmakers had the courage to open this door for kids in our state.

Another important win this year was a measure that will **impose tougher sentences against child sex predators**. The bill, as House Republicans originally proposed it, would have made the sentences mandatory and kept them from avoiding any jail time by entering an alternative treatment program. As passed, the bill does make it tougher on these criminals but doesn't go far enough. Next year I'd like to see us **strengthen this bill**.

# 2004 Legislative Report

## What was left on the table?

The Legislature left several issues unfinished this year. Here are a few I think were particularly important and ones the Legislature should take up again next year:

- Making sweeping changes to Washington’s workers’ compensation system, including simplifying rate calculations and controlling rising rates.
- Limiting state agencies’ rule-making authority and placing the burden of proof on the agency’s shoulders, not employers’.
- Passing reforms proven to control liability insurance costs and slow skyrocketing medical malpractice rates that are forcing doctors to close their practices.
- Authorizing affordable insurance plans for small employers.

## Coming soon: a new primary election system

Last year the Supreme Court declared Washington’s blanket primary election unconstitutional, leaving the Legislature to choose a new primary. Our main goals were protecting voters’ choice, privacy and independence. The plan that passed advanced the top two primary vote getters to the general election — regardless of party.

I did not vote for the primary bill because I am not personally supportive of the “Top Two” plan. I question its constitutionality and also believe it undermines our two-party system. Nevertheless, the bill passed with backup language for a second choice, a Montana-style primary, where voters don’t have to register with a party and can confidentially pick a single party’s ballot.

The Governor vetoed the Top Two idea and chose the Montana-style primary for Washington.

## Tort reform: why it’s so critical in rural communities

Are you aware that many rural hospitals and doctors are no longer delivering babies? Families are driving hours to reach a delivery room, which is posing a very real danger to

mothers and babies. Why is it happening? Because higher and higher “pain and suffering” awards are forcing up rates for all medical providers — even those with no claims. That is forcing doctors out of the prenatal care and baby delivery business. And that trend is reflected across the medical field, especially those with specialties.

The problem isn’t limited to medical services. Small employers are also seeing their liability insurance premiums soar, forcing them to cut jobs or close their doors altogether.

This year House Republicans introduced bills to stop this dangerous trend, including a proposal to put a reasonable limit on pain and suffering awards. *None of our proposals would have limited a person’s ability to sue or the amount they could collect for medical costs, costs related to care, or future wages with raises.* Unfortunately, House Democrats stopped any such measures before we could vote on them. Instead, they proposed incremental changes that fell far short of the bold changes we need, and in the end the Legislature approved little that will get us out of this crisis.

If this issue has touched you personally, I encourage you to get involved, especially next legislative session, and tell other legislators why they simply must pass bold tort reform measures.

## Please join me!

I hope to see you at one of the following forums. I’ll be providing an update on the recently completed legislative session and look forward to hearing your ideas and questions regarding issues that affect you and your family.

### Moses Lake Office Hours

Thursday, April 29

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Moses Lake Chamber Conference Room  
324 S. Pioneer Way.

For appointments, please call Karen at the Chamber: 765-7888

### Coffee with Rep. Hinkle at Martha’s Inn

Thursday, April 29, and again Thursday, May 20

3-4:30 p.m.

Martha’s Inn  
600-Frontage Road  
George, WA

### Ephrata District Office Hours

Thursday, May 20

11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Ephrata Law and Justice Bldg.  
Multi-purpose Room  
37 C Street NW

### On the Air with KBSN Radio,

Moses Lake

Thursday, May 20

9-10 a.m.

Legislative Wrap-Up with Rep. Hinkle, Rep. Janéa Holmquist and Sen. Joyce Mulliken. *Listen and call with your questions!*